



HUMAN RIGHTS CONCERNS IN CRIMEA: JUNE 2025 UPDATE

Many of the ongoing human rights violations in Russian-occupied Crimea are directly relevant to UNESCO's mandate, among them economic, social and cultural rights, including the right to education, as well as the rights to freedom of expression, association and peaceful assembly, and freedom of religion and belief, amongst others.

Russia's practices and policies in these areas amount to systematic and serious violations of international human rights law and international humanitarian law, including its wholesale imposition of its national laws on Crimea in 2014, its brutal crackdown on all peaceful dissent, its misuse of the criminal justice system for this purpose, and the steps taken to change Crimea's demographics. Since the beginning of the occupation in 2014, Russia has sought to suppress Ukrainian and Crimean Tatar languages, culture, and identities through widespread violations of civil, political, economic, social, and cultural rights. During the reporting period, the Russian authorities have taken further steps in this direction.

Notably, the Russian authorities have recently designated Amnesty International an "undesirable organisation," under Russia legislations, which gives the Prosecutor General's Office the power to thus arbitrarily criminalize any foreign organisation and ban its work and any association with it in Russia. Since Russia has fully applied its law in all occupied territories in violation of the law of occupation, this prohibition is fully enforced in Crimea. As a result, Amnesty International has been forced to review and restrict its direct communication with its interlocutors in Crimea so as not to put them at risk, which in turn has impacted the organisation's ability to gather information. This decision is part of the broader effort by the Russian government to silence peaceful dissent and crackdown on and isolate civil society in Crimea and in other territories under its control.

Latest August 2025 update: restrictions on communication platforms in Russia and the occupied territories

In August 2025, the Russian authorities imposed severe restrictions on the use of **Telegram and WhatsApp** within the Russian Federation and in the territories of Ukraine it occupies, including Crimea. The restrictions primarily targeted voice and video call functions, officially justified by the authorities as measures against "fraud" and "involvement in sabotage and terrorist activity".

Shortly thereafter, serious and sustained disruptions began affecting **Google Meet** in Russia and the occupied territories. Independent monitoring services confirmed these disruptions, which have not been linked to any internal technical failures by Google. While the official Russian IT and Comms regulator, Roskomnadzor, denied responsibility, the pattern of the disruptions suggests direct or indirect state responsibility.

These measures have effectively deprived civil society, independent journalists, and human rights defenders in Crimea and elsewhere under occupation of the primary channels of secure communication.



Observers and digital rights experts point to an intentional policy of forcing users to use **Max Messenger**, a platform owned by the state-controlled social media platform VK, and reportedly subjected to Russian state surveillance systems.

For the residents of occupied Crimea, these restrictions represent not only a denial of access to independent and safe communications tools but also an escalation of state surveillance and control over private life. This further isolates people in the occupied territories and significantly **hinders safe contact between them and human rights organisations**, including the undersigned.

Education

A key means by which Russia has sought to suppress Ukrainian, Crimean Tatar and other non-Russian identities in Crimea is the creation of obstacles for, or complete denial of education in, their native languages. Since 2014, we have seen a drastic decline in the number of children instructed in these languages.

Amnesty International's previous submission provided an analysis of how the Russian authorities restrict access to education in the Ukrainian and Crimean Tatar languages in occupied Crimea. The relevant official data and testimonies shared in the submission, point to the sharp decline in instruction in native languages and the systemic obstacles faced by those who attempt to pursue this option.

In an alarming new development, on 17 June 2025, the Ministry of Education of the Russian Federation adopted the draft Federal Education Programmes (FOOPs). Media sources familiar with this document (it cannot be accessed from outside Russia) have reported that it no longer includes the subject of "native Ukrainian language" at any level of school education, unlike the earlier FOOPs, where this subject is present. The change is explained by the authors as due to the "changed geopolitical situation in the world"¹ – undoubtedly a reference to the course of Russia's ongoing war in and occupation of Ukraine. The document is set to be fully adopted by the beginning of the academic year on 1 September 2025.

Until now, the subject "native Ukrainian language" was compulsory in occupied Zaporizhzhia and Kherson regions, and was listed as available in Crimea and two other, partially occupied, regions of Ukraine subject to parental request. However, as Amnesty International reported in its previous submission, parents were discouraged or prevented from requesting it in Crimea in previous years.

¹Quoted in "Школьная программа останется без украинского языка, но получит агротехнологический профиль", *Kommersant*, 22 June 2025, available at <https://www.kommersant.ru/doc/7832004?ysclid=mc8w15qbk410343878>. Earlier FOOPs are available at <https://xn--d1abbusdciv.xn--p1ai/%D1%84%D0%B5%D0%B4%D0%B5%D1%80%D0%B0%D0%BB%D1%8C%D0%BD%D1%8B%D0%B5-%D0%BE%D0%B1%D1%80%D0%B0%D0%B7%D0%BE%D0%B2%D0%B0%D1%82%D0%B5%D0%BB%D1%8C%D0%BD%D1%8B%D0%B5-%D0%BF%D1%80%D0%BE%D0%B3%D1%80%D0%B0%D0%BC/>.



This new policy signals a further step towards the complete removal of the Ukrainian language from the education system in the Russian-occupied territory of Ukraine.

As Amnesty International has previously reported, school children in Russian-occupied Ukrainian territories and in Russia itself are subjected to indoctrination by the Russian authorities through the curriculum. They are thereby denied their right to quality education.² This fully applies to all children in Crimea today.

UPDATE AS OF OCTOBER 2025

The draft Federal Education Programmes (FOOPs) document, as provided by the Ministry of Education of the Russian Federation on 17 June 2025, excluded the subject “native Ukrainian language” from all levels of school education.

It was not, in fact, finalised by the date of my presentation on this subject, and to the best of our knowledge, this document remains a draft. We continue to monitor this matter, as its adoption would have significant implications for access to Ukrainian-language education in the occupied territories of Ukraine. We will update UNESCO Member States accordingly in our next submission.

In the meantime, the situation with regard to the teaching of the Ukrainian language in schools in Crimea and other Russian-occupied territories of Ukraine remains a matter of great concern. There are significant practical restrictions on the teaching and use of the Ukrainian language in schools. While instruction in Ukrainian may be possible by law, parents who would like their children to receive it are effectively discouraged from requesting Ukrainian-language education and are reluctant to do so due to fear of repercussions. As a result, in practice, Ukrainian is virtually absent from the school system.

Religion

Amnesty International has previously highlighted widespread violations of the right to freedom of religion or belief in occupied Crimea, including the closure and seizure of places of worship, pressure on religious communities, and the targeting of religious leaders, particularly from minority and non-Russian-aligned faith groups. Details can be found in our previous submissions.

Unfortunately, these patterns continue. In the appalling catalogue of religious persecution, the imprisonment of Jehovah’s Witnesses solely for practising their faith, and the unfounded prosecution and imprisonment of practising Muslims under terrorism-related charges, for their alleged (and typically unproven) membership of Hizb ut-Tahrir, arbitrarily designated as a “terrorist” organization – deserve special mention.

²Amnesty International, “Ukraine/Russia: New history textbook is a blatant attempt to unlawfully indoctrinate school children in Russia and Russian-occupied Ukrainian territories”, 1 September 2023, available at <https://www.amnesty.org/en/latest/news/2023/09/ukraine-russia-new-history-textbook-is-a-blatant-attempt-to-unlawfully-indoctrinate-school-children-in-russia-and-russian-occupied-ukrainian-territories/>.



In June 2025, the Russian occupation authorities reported that their investigation against Vitaliy Buryk, a 53-year-old Jehovah's Witness from Kerch, had been completed and the case had been submitted to court.³ He is accused under Russian criminal law of organising the activities of a banned religious organisation. According to the de facto authorities, he was the leader of the local group of Jehovah's Witnesses, arbitrarily declared "extremist" and banned by a Russian court under legislation that is applied in occupied Crimea in contravention of international humanitarian law.

Amnesty International has made it clear that any Jehovah's Witness imprisoned solely for practising their faith is a prisoner of conscience who must be immediately and unconditionally released.

Persecution of other religious minorities in Crimea also continues. The number of prisoners from among Crimea's Muslims, the overwhelming majority of whom are ethnic Crimean Tatars, who have been prosecuted and deprived of their liberty based on unfounded and politically motivated charges, has also continued to grow.

On 29 April 2025, the Southern District Military Court in Rostov-on-Don sentenced six Crimean Tatar men, members of the so-called "second Dzhankoy group" in the "Hizb ut-Tahrir case", to prison terms ranging from 11 to 14 years. They were convicted under Article 205.5(2) of the Russian Criminal Code (participation in the activities of a terrorist organisation) and Article 30(1) in conjunction with Article 278 (preparation for the violent seizure of power). These individuals were prosecuted solely for their alleged involvement in an Islamic organisation arbitrarily banned in Russia but not in Ukraine. Their transfer to Russia and trial under Russian criminal law is a violation of international humanitarian law (law of occupation), and their trial by a military court is a further violation of their right to a fair trial. In a further violation of the law of occupation, all individuals from Crimea convicted under terrorism-related charges are sent to serve their sentences in penitentiary institutions in Russia, often hundreds or thousands kilometres away from their homes and families in Crimea.

On 5 June 2025, officers from the anti-extremism unit of the Ministry of Internal Affairs of the Russian Federation visited the Zubeyr Jami Mosque in Crimea. They claimed they were conducting a "routine inspection." On 11 June, they returned with a summons notice for Idris Yurdamov, head of the independent Muslim community "Eski Qırım," accusing him of possessing "extremist materials." On 13 June, police issued him with a notice of an administrative offence under Article 20.29 of the Russian Code of Administrative Offences (production and circulation of extremist materials). This offence is punishable by a fine or so-called administrative arrest for up to 15 days, and such penalties are typically imposed following swift court hearings which examine little if any evidence other than the police report. The standard of proof in such "administrative" proceedings is very low, even by Russian standards, and the presence of a defence

³Investigative Committee of the Russian Federation for Crimea and Sevastopol, "Лидер керченской ячейки запрещенной религиозной организации «Свидетели Иеговы» предстанет перед судом", 23 June 2025, available at https://crim.sledcom.ru/news/item/1994697/?utm_source=insight.



counsel is not required, in marked difference to criminal proceedings and in spite of the severity of the penalties.

These cases demonstrate how Russia continues to misuse anti-extremism and anti-terrorism legislation in occupied Crimea to persecute religious minorities, particularly local Jehovah's Witnesses and Muslims.

Please refer to our previous submissions for some prominent personal stories of violations of the right to freedom of religion or belief, and persecution and imprisonment of members of religious communities in Crimea.

Media

We have previously reported in detail on the suppression of the right to freedom of expression and media freedom in Crimea. This includes the arbitrary closure of prominent Ukrainian- and Crimean Tatar-language media outlets, the blocking of online access to those that relocated to government-controlled Ukraine, the arbitrary detention, prosecution and imprisonment of independent journalists and bloggers on politically motivated charges, and the ongoing harassment and intimidation of the few independent media outlets that still operate under occupation.

Since our last submission, these violations have continued.

Between May and December 2024, the occupying authorities initiated six administrative cases against the Qirim newspaper, the only independent Crimean Tatar-language printed media outlet in Crimea. These cases targeted the editor-in-chief, Bekir Mamutov, as well as the founder Seyran Ibraghimov. They stand accused of “discrediting the Russian armed forces” for publishing an article that called on the Indigenous Peoples of Crimea not to support Russia’s war against Ukraine, as well as “abuse of freedom of mass information” and “dissemination of unreliable socially significant information” for republishing the UN Secretary-General’s report on the human rights situation in Crimea in the Crimean Tatar language. The cumulative fines imposed on the outlet amounted to 834,000 Russian Rubles (approx. US\$ 9,500).

In April 2025, the de facto authorities sent an official warning⁴ to the printing house contracted by Qirim, citing alleged violations of Russian law related to the publication of the UN report. As a result, the printing house suspended its contract with the newspaper.

On 22 February 2025, Crimean Tatar journalist and human rights defender Lutfiye Zudiyeva, a contributor to the Ukrainian media outlet Graty and long-time activist with Crimean Solidarity, was designated by the Russian Justice Ministry a “foreign agent.” Zudiyeva has reported on political reprisals and court proceedings in occupied Crimea. The designation imposes extensive restrictions on her work and public communications, including the mandatory use of the “foreign agent” label on any publication and onerous reporting requirements. Under the Russian “foreign agents” legislation, failure to comply

⁴Amnesty International has seen a copy of the document.



with these requirements results in severe penalties and may lead to two-year imprisonment.

This step followed years of persecution. In 2019, Zudiyeva was fined for purportedly displaying an “extremist symbol,” on a social media post which she claimed wasn’t hers and which dated back to 2014. In July 2023, she was detained outside the de facto Supreme Court of Crimea while covering a politically sensitive case and was later fined again. In February 2024, her home was searched, and she was detained and accused of “abuse of media freedom” over posts on her Facebook page that mentioned Radio Liberty without indicating that it had been designated a “foreign agent” by the Russian authorities. In March 2024, she was fined again, and in May 2024, she received a formal “warning” from local police authorities against organising or participating in any public gatherings.

According to our sources, other Crimean Tatar activists received similar “warnings” around the time, as part of the occupation authorities’ ongoing effort to suppress commemoration of the 18 May 1944 anniversary, the day when the entire ethnic Crimean Tatar population of Crimea was forcibly removed from the peninsula to remote parts of the then-Soviet Union, and subsequently prohibited from returning to Crimea until the late 1980s.

Freedom of expression

Amnesty International has previously reported in detail on the widespread suppression of the right to freedom of expression in occupied Crimea. Apart from independent media, virtually all free and dissenting voices have been forced out, imprisoned or otherwise silenced, while those who remain or attempt to speak out face severe consequences – including arbitrary detention, prosecution on trumped-up charges, and other reprisals, including forced televised “apologies” for such acts of defiance as listening to Ukrainian music, even in private. Details of these cases can be found in our previous submissions.

Even the mildest criticism of Russia’s war against Ukraine remains outlawed and criminalised under Russian legislation, including laws that prohibit “discrediting” the armed forces. Hefty fines are the penalty for this “offence,” while repeated violations may result in criminal prosecution and imprisonment.

As previously reported, by 10 March 2025, the Mission of the President of Ukraine in Crimea recorded 1,242 such cases, with 220 individuals sentenced to prison. Notably, although Crimean Tatars comprise only 12% of the peninsula’s population, they accounted for 133 of those imprisoned. According to updated data from the Mission, as of 27 May 2025, at least 222 individuals remained behind bars as a result of politically motivated prosecution.

Ongoing injustice, legal remedies denied

Those subjected to harassment, arrest, unfair trials, and imprisonment are denied access to justice and effective remedies. Amnesty International has previously documented the



immense difficulty of securing legal defence in such cases. The few lawyers willing to take on clients in cases of politically motivated prosecution in Crimea face reprisals themselves, including disbarment, intimidation, and arbitrary detention. This also applies to lawyers from the Russian Federation who attempt to represent clients in Crimea.

As detailed in Amnesty International's previous submissions and reports, Crimea-based lawyers Alexey Ladin, Lilia Gemedzhi, Rustem Kyamilev, and Nazim Sheikhmambetov have been disbarred, as has Aleksei Ladin, a lawyer from Tyumen who represented clients in Crimea, while lawyer Emil Kurbedinov and others have faced arrest and harassment for carrying out their professional activities.

Changing Crimea's demography, other violations

As previously reported, the occupying Russian authorities have continued their efforts to reshape the demographic and cultural landscape of Crimea. Alongside restrictions on education, religion, and media, the occupying authorities persistently violate the rights of Indigenous Peoples, especially Crimean Tatars, primarily by targeting their representative institutions, education and language use. These actions suppress non-Russian identities.

Severe restrictions on the rights to freedom of association and peaceful assembly remain in place. The Mejlis of the Crimean Tatar People, the highest representative body of the Indigenous Crimean Tatar people, remains arbitrarily banned as an "extremist" organisation, and its premises have been confiscated. This continues to violate the right of Indigenous Peoples to maintain and develop their own political, economic, and social institutions, as protected under international human rights standards.

On 23 May 2025, in the town of Saky, the occupying authorities detained 82-year-old Zevdzheth Kurtumerov, a delegate of the Qurultay (the national congress of the Crimean Tatar people) and a member of the Executive Board of the World Congress of Crimean Tatars. He was taken from his home and held incommunicado for a day before being released. No charges or further details have been disclosed. Zevdzheth Kurtumerov is a long-standing figure in the Crimean Tatar national movement. His detention is another instance of the occupying authorities' policy of intimidation and denial of representation of Indigenous Peoples.

Russia must immediately end all violations of international humanitarian and human rights law in Crimea and all Ukrainian territories it occupies.